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RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
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SIPDIS

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STATE FOR EAP/MLF, DRL/IRF AND PRM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: ALLEGATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM VIOLATION IN ARREST OF ETHNIC MINORITY PASTOR IN CENTRAL HIGHLANDS UNFOUNDED

REF: PRM - TSWANSON 6/6/07 EMAIL

¶1. (SBU) On March 4, the South Carolina-based Montagnard Foundation (MF) issued a press release asserting that on February 17, Vietnamese troops in the Central Highlands province of Dak Lak arrested Y-Ja Nie and T-Tuc Buonya "because they are Christians who refused to join the government-recognized church." The press release asserts that five days later Y-Tuc Buonya was released but Y-Ja Nie was sent to prison "because he is the preacher of house church at his village of Buon Moak."

¶2. (SBU) Separately, a New York-based lawyer with a longtime interest in Vietnamese refugee issues contacted PRM to inquire about the arrest of Y-Ja Nie. Per ref, Y-Ja Nie is the brother of a refugee family that resettled in Canada in December 2006. ConGen's Humanitarian Resettlement Office (HRS) confirmed that Y-Ja Nie, 55, sent a request for a Humanitarian Resettlement application form early in 2007. He was arrested before his family received the form.

¶3. (SBU) At the same time, post also was investigating other allegations that a second pastor named Ama Bin had been arrested in the same village. On June 7, we spoke with Pastor Huynh Vu, General Secretary of the Vietnam Christian Inter-Fellowship church (VNCIF), who confirmed to us that Ama Bin and Y-Ja Nie are the same person. Pastor Vu told us that Ama Bin was the local representative of his church, having switched from the GVN-recognized Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV) some years before. The pastor told us that the VNCIF house church organization has over 2,000 congregations throughout Vietnam; some 30 have been registered locally thus far under Vietnam's legal framework on religion. He told us that the VNCIF has not had problems of harassment, even in Dak Lak.

¶4. (SBU) Pastor Vu told us that after Ama Bin was arrested, he received a call from representatives of the Ministry of Public Security who informed him that Ama Bin was arrested for his involvement in "the Dega movement." According to the police, Ama Bin was in communication via cell phone with "people in the United States." The police would not provide additional details. The accusation and arrest came as a total surprise to the VNCIF, the pastor told us. Because of the nature of the charges, the VNCIF decided not to get involved in the case.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Since its recognition in 2001, some Montagnard advocacy groups have sought to paint the SECV as Communist collaborators and to cast the arrest of persons who appear to be involved with the separatist "Dega Protestant Church" as "true Christians" and victims of religious oppression. For supporters of an independent ethnic minority state in the Central Highlands, the SECV -- which represents 90 percent of ethnic minority Protestants in the area -- is a real threat because its success undercuts the argument that ethnic minority groups

cannot find durable solutions in a GVN-controlled Central Highlands. As we have seen in other cases of MF allegations that we have investigated, there is a grain of truth to the story, but it has been distorted significantly. There is no doubt that Ama Bin remains under detention in a Dak Lak prison. While it is unclear whether he was indeed involved in promoting ethnic minority separatism in the Central Highlands or was merely talking to his recently-resettled relatives in Canada, our discussions with Ama Bin's church colleagues makes clear that the MF's allegations that he was detained because of his religious practice appear to be spurious. End Comment.

WINNICK